

Key Research Findings: MS Public Opinion on Bioterrorism

Mississippi Department of Health

Bioterrorism is a real concern

Mississippi residents and professionals are genuinely concerned about bioterrorism, even if the threat is not top of mind.

- When asked which public health threats and emergencies they are most concerned about, emergency professionals rank bioterrorism first (18% of respondents), followed by specific forms of bioterrorism including contaminated water supply (14%) and chemical exposure related to terrorism (10%).
- Seven in ten MS residents (70%) say they have given thought to the possibility of a terrorist event in the state.
- A majority of MS residents (55%) say they are concerned “a great deal” about terrorism. More Mississippians say they are a great deal concerned about bioterrorism incidents such as outbreaks of disease (70%); contamination of the water supply (66%); and release of toxins into the air (63%).

Preparation in advance is critical

Mississippians agree that individuals and communities need to do more to prepare for the possibility of bioterrorism.

- Emergency professionals believe preparation is necessary because bioterrorism is different from other types of emergencies. More than 4 in 5 professionals agree (84%) that: *The threat of bioterrorism is real and creates greater public anxiety than a natural disaster.*
- Most MS residents want information pre-event to: be better prepared (67%); know how to help my community (56%); know how to create a household emergency plan (54%); know what to include in a disaster supply kit (52%); and know how to talk to children about it (51%).

Department of Health is positioned to be the best source

Professionals and residents in Mississippi use a variety of sources to stay informed; but MDH’s existing network and reach suggest the agency could be Mississippi’s best source for bioterrorism preparedness and response.

- More emergency professionals (63%) rely on the MDH website than any other state health source to keep abreast of news that affects public health.
- Most MS residents have dealt with their local health department (57%) or seen or heard an announcement from the public health department (55%).
- More than half of MS residents with on-line access (52%) say they would try to access the MDH Web site if the state faced a terrorism event.

This document summarizes key findings from two studies conducted by Widmeyer Research & Polling for the Mississippi State Department of Health. The first, a Risk Communications Assessment, was a survey conducted on-line with 249 public health and emergency professionals in the state. The second, the Mississippi and Terrorism Public Opinion Poll, was a telephone poll conducted with 200 Mississippians ages 18 or older. Both studies were conducted in the fall of 2003.

www.HealthyMS.com

866-HLTHY4U

866-458-4948